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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ADDIS ABABA 003425

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SUBJECT: ETHIOPIA: THE VIEW FROM HARAR AND DIRE DAWA (PART II OF II)

REF: ADDIS ABABA 3424

Classified By: Ambassador Donald Yamamoto. Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary (Part II)

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11. (C) Harar and Dire Dawa based contacts, including religious leaders, told PolOff on a December 10-12 trip to the two cities (reftel) the mixed Christian and Muslim regions of Harar and Dire Dawa are a model for religious tolerance and the religious community in both places vigilantly guards against extremism by informing government authorities whenever extremists attempt to gain a foothold. Harar has not experienced spill over effects from instability in the neighboring Ogaden region due to a massive state security presence, according to the opposition party representative. A Somali People's Democratic Party (SPDP) representative told PolOff that atrocities are continuing in the Ogaden (although he had not observed incidents first-hand), but added that Ogadenis will not speak to diplomats in Ethiopia for fear of reprisal. End Part II Summary.

Islamic Council Touts Religious Tolerance...

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12. (C) The Harar Regional President, the Regional Vice President and mainstream opposition Oromo People's Congress (OPC) representative separately asserted that Harar, an historically Muslim region with a mixed Christian and Muslim population, provides a model for religious tolerance. Sheikh Ibrahim, of the (government sanctioned) Supreme Islamic Council of Harar, underscored that the Harar regional government does not interfere with religion, noting "the administration is concerned with peace and development and we have good relations with it. The EPRDF has recognized the constitutional rights of all religions, and the government does not favor any one religion." The Sheikh added that the Harar faith community "does not accept conflict between religions. We have a robust interfaith dialogue between Christian and Muslim religious leaders, based on monthly meetings." Religious tensions are minimal in Harar, the OPC representative separately concurred, but "politics is the more divisive issue and the anger and frustration is palpable." Sheikh Muktar of the Supreme Islamic Council of Dire Dawa painted a similar picture of religious tolerance in Dire Dawa. "Muslims and Christians cooperate on everything, and in particular we consult on how to further Dire Dawa's economic development" Sheikh Muktar said, adding that the practice of religion in Dire Dawa is "free from politics."

The Sheikh noted that "good interfaith dialogue and wisdom keep Ethiopia free from religious conflict."

...and Guards Against Extremism  
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¶3. (C) The government and faith communities in both Harar and Dire Dawa vigilantly guard against extremism, according to the Supreme Islamic Council in both towns. In Harar, Sheikh Ibrahim said that the mosques affiliated with the Supreme Islamic Council actively preach religious tolerance. A Sufi, Sheikh Ibrahim said that the Supreme Islamic Council members "are against Wahabism, but we don't fight. Our Imams explain our views. We have an anti-Wahabism school in Harar. A well known Ogadeni mufti is fighting against the Wahabis." The Sheikh added that the Supreme Islamic Council cooperates closely with the government on security matters. "We have community centers throughout the countryside," he said, "and if we hear someone is preaching extremism we go immediately to the problem and remove it. If we find a troublemaker, we inform the government. We also work with the Eastern Oromiya Supreme Islamic Council to control extremism. Some Wahabists have tried to infiltrate the Harar region with no success, so we have no serious concerns." Harar Regional President Murad separately noted that "Harar wants to train Imams for Ethiopia and the world, to strengthen traditional schools, to keep old traditions alive and to prevent extremist cultures from penetrating." Both Murad and Ragassa said that insecurity in the neighboring Somali region has had little impact on Harar. Murad cautioned that "development will be needed to mitigate the problems in the Ogaden" and remarked

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that if the insurgent Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) establishes links with extremists in Eritrea and Somalia, "problems will multiply for us." The strong presence of state security in Harar, however, has neutralized any potential spill over effects from the Ogaden violence, according to the OPC representative. "There is a massive plainclothes law enforcement presence in Harar," the OPC representative said, "and they will pick up and interrogate anyone on even the slightest suspicion. If they find an issue with someone, they will just let them rot in prison."

¶4. (C) In Dire Dawa, Sheikh Muktar said the Supreme Islamic Council immediately informs the Ethiopian government if "foreigners" propagate "bad religion," and the Sheikh noted that in most cases the government swiftly takes "appropriate action." The Supreme Islamic Council of Dire Dawa has a strict code of conduct for its imams, Sheikh Muktar said, noting that, in turn, imams must approve all preaching. "Preaching must be positive, help progress and be non-controversial, or the imam will stop the preaching and, if necessary, inform the police," Sheikh Muktar said.

SPDP: Ogaden Violence Continues  
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¶5. (C) According to a Somali regional councilmember, and member of the EPRDF Somali Region ally SPDP, the conflict between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and the ONLF is stalemated and abuses continue on both sides. "In the Ogaden," the SPDP representative said, "there is no winner and no loser. The ENDF tried to crush the ONLF, but they could not control the territory and their efforts backfired. The number of ONLF fighters has increased substantially because the ENDF targeted civilians." The SPDP representative said he had not observed any atrocities first hand, but added that he is certain they are continuing. "You can imagine that if, during the 2005 elections, the ENDF shot people in Addis Ababa, the heart of the African Union, they have done far worse in the bush." PolOff sought access to Ogadenis in Dire Dawa who might be able to tell their side of the story, but the SPDP representative said "Ogadenis are terrified to talk. I know Councilmembers from Jijiga. Most are exiled. They have been beaten, tortured or seen their

families killed. Almost all educated Ogadenis are in jail. The only reason I can even have this discussion with you is because I am not Ogadeni."

6.(C) The SPDP representative continued, "it is a big mistake if the international community believes the Ogaden violence has stopped. There is a news blackout. The United Nations came through at one point but the team was escorted by the Ethiopian government, which hid the victims. Why doesn't America react to this story? You should find out the truth and do something about it." The SPDP official said that he had not heard any recent reports of ethnic Somalis being hung by wire, as was reported last year, but he insisted that "killing, harassment and intimidation has not stopped." He emphasized that both the ENDF and ONLF are culpable for the on-going violence. "The ONLF is also a criminal institution," he said, "and the Ogadeni people are caught in the middle. Without change there will be a big problem in the long run. We hear so much in the news about Darfur, why not the Ogaden? The Ogaden is the soft underbelly of the Ethiopian state." Queried whether the Ethiopian government takes seriously accusations of human rights abuses, the SPDP representative said, "the government's biggest problem is that it can't learn from its mistakes. Human Rights Watch recently told the world of the problems in the Ogaden through a detailed report. Instead of reconciling, the Ethiopian government attacked Human Rights Watch. The response was shameful. The (ruling) EPRDF will repeat its mistakes in the 2010 national elections. After that, the future is hard to predict, but the United States props up Meles' government, and therefore should have access to the Ogaden." "Talk to local Ogadenis," the SPDP representative said, "right now you only talk to the perpetrators."

YAMAMOTO